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Lessing, Geschichte seines Lebens und seiner Schriften von Prof. Dr. Erich Schmidt. Zweiten Bandes erste Abtheilung. Berlin, 1886.

In a short notice printed on the inside of the cover Dr. Schmidt excuses himself for not publishing the entire second volume of his Lessing-biography at the promised time. His call to the excellent position of "Director des Goethe-Archivs in Weimar" has probably been the principal occasion of this fragmentary issue. The most important works of Lessing's mature life: 'Laokoon,' the 'Hamburgische Dramaturgie,' and 'Emilia Galotti' are treated, however, in this volume, and it will certainly not be doing the author an injustice if we try to form an estimate of the work he has thus far accomplished.

Of all the German classics, Lessing has been one of the most fortunate. Not only were his works edited by so eminent a philologist and critic as K. Lachmann, but he also found in Danzel one of the ablest and most congenial of biographers. A vast number of publications at the recent memorial of his death have increased our knowledge in respect to the minutest details of his life. It is an easy and yet at the same time a most difficult task for the biographer to work with such material and with predecessors who have already set up the highest standard of achievement. Acknowledging the merits of Schmidt's labor: the abundance of facts, their skillful grouping, the fluent style, we still cannot say that he attains the ideal rendered necessary by the work of those who have preceded him. We require more than that which Schmidt has given us. A man of Lessing's extraordinary influence upon the German mind must necessarily be treated in a spirit that does full justice to him. We want to see his life arise all new before us, to see his development, his activity in the different spheres of mental life, his influence upon the nation and, above all, his position in the general history of his countrymen.

Gottfried Keller's cry: "Komm tapftrer Lessing," placed at the head of Schmidt's volumes will scarcely cause him to return to us. There is no doubt that an exact and minute knowledge of facts is necessary, in order that the historian may give us a true picture of his

hero. But this is not all; and, if Schmidt has failed in his attempt, it is due to his lack of another and no less important requirement. By this we do not mean a philosophic construction of Lessing's views, which the poet-critic himself never affected, but rather that power of intuition which is able to reconstruct his life and character in the general framework of his times. The materialistic tendencies prevailing in the methods of our contemporary mental science, the desire to compete with the natural sciences in respect to complete exactness, have certainly influenced Prof. Schmidt as well. But it is amusing and gratifying to see how they are utterly insufficient to penetrate the secret of a personality, and how they can never transcend the limits prescribed by their own nature. Schmidt, for example, has diligently collected the material, he has read for his purpose books of the eighteenth century which other mortals would hardly take into their hands; it is material well grouped, made palatable by certain charms of style; but the real essence of Lessing's nature and mission is never revealed to us. We need more failures like this in order to see the distinction between the natural and the mental sciences, and to become aware that both have their own methods and that the application of those of the one to the other leads finally to confusion and counter-sense.

To prove this we need look at Schmidt's treatment of the important question of the tragic in the 'Hamburgische Dramaturgie.' Above all it was necessary here to show the difference between the ancient and modern views of the world as they are reflected in the tragedies of both periods. Schmidt had to prove that *phobos* and *deos*, the effects of the ancient tragedy as required by Aristotle, were only possible in a time which believed in the ruling of an almighty, merciless fate. Lessing, fully convinced of the infallible authority of Aristotle, adopted "Mitleid" and "Furcht" without making clear to himself the Greek presupposition of fate. But as soon as he came to arouse *phobos* and *deos* by his own dramas he discovered the necessity of an equivalent for fate. And half unconsciously he substituted the "intrigue" for the "fatum" in which he, as a modern, could not believe. He thus approached the true modern idea of tragic guilt, as embodied in Shakespeare's

dramas. But he only approached it, and one of the great defects in the character of Emilia in 'Em. Galotti' must be ascribed to this. We have a number of utterances on this subject by Lessing at various periods of his life. We can see how his mind was occupied by it, and we can follow the gradual development of his views. Schmidt in his superficial, journalistic manner has no time to follow them. Perhaps he even does not wish to consider them, as the pessimistic public for which his book is intended does not believe in guilt. He therefore hurries on to the main point in Lessing's discussions of the tragic: the explanation of the *katharsis*. But instead of showing us the meaning of Lessing's words in the light that might be thrown upon them by a comparison of all his views, Schmidt proceeds in his usual manner. He quotes all the Frenchmen with whom Lessing differed, says a few things about Lessing's stand-point, and finally concludes his presentation of the case by stating and accepting Jacob Bernay's opinion on the subject. It seems to be an occasion of especial delight to Schmidt, that the Greeks sometimes took a tragedy for their souls as we nowadays take castor-oil for another purpose. Prof. Schmidt's incapability of treating æsthetic principles, the utter weakness of the whole method appears, however, when, speaking of the cause of our enjoyment of the tragic, he says: "Unsere Lust am Trauerspiel liegt in unserer allgemeinen Aufnahmefähigkeit und in unsrem Trieb alle in uns schlummernden Regungen zu bethätigen."

It is useless for Schmidt to cover his bare, dry reasoning,—a manner of treatment always connected with this method—by the flowers of an elegant style. He greatly enjoys the use of metaphors, but he forgets that the gift of creating them has been denied to shallow reasoning. We instantly discover how eagerly he has to hunt for them and the author's constant state of breathlessness steals silently and uncomfortably upon the reader. What a torture, for example, to hear him call Lessing's treatise: 'Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet' "ein duftiges Opfer für die antike Weltanschauung und Kunst." Besides these unfortunate metaphors, we find a number of expressions which are entirely out of place in a biography of Lessing. We certainly do not

believe in approaching the classics in full dress and kid gloves, but we equally despise that "Kneipendeutsch" which Schmidt is very fond of using. It is evident that he tries to imitate W. Scherer without having, however, Scherer's talent and sound judgment. But even Scherer in his desire to write an original style, is very often carried in wrong directions. The style of certain modern German journalists, an imitation of the French "causerie" which Scherer sometimes uses, is entirely contrary to the spirit of the German language. One need but look into German papers and periodicals of the common order to discover a provoking mish-mash, which passes for elegant German at present. The example of men like Scherer and Schmidt, who are presumed to understand the genius of the German language, will unfortunately only encourage this.

It has seemed necessary to speak of this last point, since Lessing himself was one of the greatest masters of German style. But if he could read Schmidt's book he would not only wonder at the style, he would be astonished at the whole curious picture which has been drawn of him in the nineteenth century. And perhaps he would really decide to come back again in order to show us who he was. Ja tapfrer Lessing, komm!

JULIUS GOEBEL.

The Syntax of the Subjunctive Mood in French, for High Schools and Colleges, by Alonzo Williams, A. M., Professor of Modern Languages in Brown University. Boston, Schoenhof; New York, Christern, 1885, 12mo., XII, 77.

The author's aim has been "to furnish a body of practical rules for class room use" and he has been eminently successful in his undertaking: this work is neat, handy, scholarly and well adapted to its purpose. Every French teacher well knows the great difficulty there is to make this perplexing subject of French Syntax comprehensible to the ordinary student. In many practical grammars, the details are so mixed, the essential are so bunglingly distinguished from the non-essential phrase-elements or, in some cases even, not at all separated, that the pupil hopelessly wades through the mass of material and comes out in the end with